

Message Text

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 1895

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IS, LE,SY, PFOR
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 1067 AND 1182

1. WE HAVE NOTED WITH SOME INTEREST FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS' REQUEST (BEIRUT 1102--THAT THE U.S. RELAY TO THE ISRAELIS HIS CONCERN AND THAT OF PRESIDENT SARKIS THAT CONTINUED LEBANESE CHRISTIAN ADVANCES IN SOUTH LEBANON, WITH ISRAELI SUPPORT, MAY PROVOKE SYRIAN REACTION). FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON INDICATED DURING THE SECRETARY'S VISIT THAT ISRAEL MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN AN AGREEMENT WITH THE GOL (ALSO SEE '76 TEL AVIV 8069) CONCERNING THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER AREA, AND WOULD PROBABLY DO SO AGAIN IF BOUTROS' MESSAGE WERE PASSED TO HIM. ANOTHER ISRAELI REACTION WOULD LIKELY BE TO WONDER IF THE GOL WERE REALLY READY TO TALK TURKEY OVER SOUTH LEBANON.

2. AS FOR THE IDEA THAT THE SYRIANS COULD NOT AFFORD TO STAND IDLY BY AMIDST ACCUSATIONS OF COMPLICITY WITH ISRAELI EFFORTS TO STAMP OUT PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS,
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WE THINK THAT THE GOI WOULD TAKE THIS WITH A GRAIN OF SALT. IN ISRAELI EYES, SUCH CHARGES AGAINST THE SYRIANS WOULD ADD LITTLE TO SIMILAR ONES WHICH AROSE IN JANUARY WHEN THE ADF MOVED ON NABATIYAH, OR EARLIER THIS MONTH WHEN PRO AND ANTI-SYRIAN ELEMENTS OF THE PFLP-GC FOUGHT IN NABATIYAH. ON THE OTHER HAND, SUCH A MESSAGE COMING FROM SARKIS MIGHT MAKE THE ISRAELIS SUSPICIOUS THAT

ASSAD HAS PUT HIM UP TO DELIVERING A VEILED SYRIAN THREAT.

3. OUR FEELING IS THAT, WITHOUT FURTHER EVIDENCE IT IS HARD TO CREDIT THE SUSPICION OF A "GRAND PLAN" OF THE ISRAELIS, WHEREBY THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE CHAMOUNISTS AND/OR THE SOUTH LEBANESE IS MEANT TO LEAD, FOR EXAMPLE, TO A SEPARATIST CHRISTIAN "STATE" OR WHATEVER. (INCIDENTALLY, WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE ALLEGED PRESENCE OF ISRAELIS IN JOUNIEH--BEIRUT 1067.) DURING THE LONG MONTHS OF THE LEBANESE AGONY AND THE SYRIAN "INVASION," PRIME MINISTER RABIN TOLD THE ISRAELI PUBLIC ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT ISRAEL RECOGNIZED THAT IT HAD ONLY LIMITED INFLUENCE ON THE COURSE OF EVENTS IN ITS NEIGHBORING ARAB STATES. WE TEND TO THINK THAT THIS WAS NOT ENTIRELY FALSE MODESTY.

4. WE HAVE ALSO NOTED AMBASSADOR PARKER'S REQUEST FOR OUR ASSESSMENT OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS REGARDING LEBANON. WE BELIEVE THAT THE ISRAELIS SEE THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE SOUTH LEBANESE (ESPECIALLY THE CHRISTIANS) AS ESSENTIALLY LIMITED IN SCOPE AND DERIVING ITS RATIONALE IN THEIR SHARED ANTIPATHY TO PALESTINIAN CONTROL OF THAT AREA (ALTHOUGH THE GOI IS ON RECORD AS PREFERRING THE "LESSER EVIL" OF PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON TO SYRIAN FORCES THERE) AND IN ISRAELI DETERMINATION THAT, SHOULD WAR RECUR, THE SYRIAN ARMY WILL NOT GET OFF TO A START FROM POSITIONS IN EXTREME SOUTHERN LEBANON. IN SECRET

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ADDITION WE FEEL THE GOI HAS A STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN VILLAGES. THE GOI SEES THE PRESENT LEBANESE AUTHORITIES AS BEING IN A PRECARIOUS DEPENDENCY ON SYRIA, WHOSE MILITARY FORCES ARE THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT MILITARY REALITY IN LEBANON; BY COMPARISON, THE ISRAELIS FEEL, THE SOUTH LEBANESE FORCES TO WHOM THEY THEMSELVES HAVE GIVEN SUPPORT ARE INCONSEQUENTIAL. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE GOI WOULD FULLY SUPPORT SEPARATIST CHRISTIAN AMBITIONS IN LIGHT OF THE ENORMOUS DIFFICULTIES THIS WOULD POSE WITH THE LEBANESE, THE ARAB WORLD, THE U.S., ETC. A SOMEWHAT RELATED POINT IS THAT TOPGOI OFFICIALS HAVE EXPLAINED MANY TIMES THAT ISRAEL HAS NO TERRITORIAL CLAIMS ON LEBANON, AND VICE VERSA. WE DO NOT DOUBT THAT THE GOL IN PARTICULAR UNDERSTANDS ISRAEL'S IMPLIED MESSAGE THAT LEBANON SHOULD REMAIN A NON-CONFRONTATION STATE.

5. WE WONDER WHETHER THERE WAS ANY REASON WHY BOUTROS

NOTED ISRAEL'S OPENING TWO NEW BORDER CROSSING POINTS (PRESUMABLY, MAKING "OFFICIAL" THE GATES AT DOVEV AND METULLA, TEL AVIV 1773), BUT FAILED TO NOTE THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT ISRAEL HAS BEGUN REGULAR BUS SERVICE INTO LEBANON (TEL AVIV 1275). IT WOULD SEEM TO BE UP TO ISRAEL ALONE TO DESIGNATE WHERE IT WISHES EXIT AND ENTRY POINTS ON ITS SIDE OF THE BORDER, BUT UNCONVENTIONAL FOR ISRAEL TO DECIDE UNILATERALLY TO SCHEDULE INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT.

6. FINALLY, WE WOULD NOTE THAT SOME THOUGHTFUL ISRAELIS HAVE TOLD US THAT ONE OF THE MAJOR LESSONS OF THE PAST 18 MONTHS HAS BEEN THE AWARENESS IN BOTH ISRAEL AND SYRIA THAT THEY SHARED A MUTUAL (VIS-A-VIS THE PALESTINAINS) INTEREST IN LEBANON AND THAT EACH HAD ACTED IN A MANNER WHICH TOOK ACCOUNT OF THE OTHER'S INTEREST. THIS AWARENESS OF A COMMONALITY
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OF INTERESTS IS TOO IMPORTANT TO LOSE AND IT MUST BE NURTURED AND ENCOURAGED, WE ARE TOLD, BECAUSE IT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE UNDERSTANDING. WHILE THIS IS DEFINITELY A MINORITY VIEW, HELD PRIMARILY BY ACADEMICS AND JOURNALISTS, AND PROBABLY OVER-OPTIMISTIC, IT IS REPORTED FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH.
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